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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMCSUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0237

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1086

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 002867

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/05/2026

TAGS: PREL PTER MOPS CVIS LE SY

SUBJECT: LEBANON: MURR SAYS GOL-UNIFIL MARITIME FORCE

AGREEMENT IS READY

REF: BEIRUT 2841

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S/NF) During a 9/5 meeting at his Rabieh home with the Ambassador and poloff, Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Elias Murr said that the GOL and UNIFIL had worked out the operational guidelines governing international maritime assistance, adding that Prime Minister Siniora would send the letter formally requesting assistance to UNSYG Annan this evening (something that did not, in fact, happen). Murr provided some atmospherics from the 9/4 Cabinet session during which the letter was debated. Murr supports the establishment of a UNIFIL "liaison" office at the airport, while noting he would like the LAF-UNIFIL-IDF coordination sessions to continue after the completion of the IDF withdrawal. The politically acceptable cover should be, he said, the need to discuss modifying the 1949 Armistice Agreement. Murr gave the Ambassador some details on the bombing which had taken place that morning targeting an ISF colonel, and also mentioned his suspicions as to the perpetrators. Pleading again for rapid assistance to be provided to the LAF, Murr said that the most immediate need is ammunition. As he has before, Murr advised the Ambassador not to travel outside the immediate environs of Christian East Beirut (although he denied having specific threat information). END SUMMARY.

AGREEMENT READY FOR UN MARITIME ASSISTANCE

¶2. (S/NF) Noting that Siniora would send a letter later on 9/5 to UNSYG Annan formally requesting maritime assistance from UNIFIL -- something that did not actually happen yet -- Murr said that the GOL and UNIFIL had already worked out an agreement governing the roles and the rules of engagement for the international maritime force and the Lebanese navy. Murr said that there will be a joint air and sea operation center and that UNIFIL can maintain maritime command centers in Tyre and Naqoura. He said that he has also agreed to UNIFIL presence in Lebanon's other ports (Sidon, Beirut, Jounieh, and Tripoli) based on logistics needs -- the UNIFIL ships will occasionally need to pull into those harbors, either for protection from inclement weather or shore leave needs. Murr

said that the French and Italians can begin interim maritime patrols, pending the arrival of a permanent force, within two days of the request being activated (which depends upon the air blockade being lifted).

¶3. (S/NF) Describing the 9/4 Lebanese Cabinet meeting to decide on the letter the UN, Murr said that all the Shi'a ministers - from both Hizballah and Nabih Berri's Amal - had been initially opposed to requesting the force. The debate went on for four hours, according to Murr, with some ministers arguing that the Lebanese Armed Forces are completely capable of securing Lebanese territorial waters without international assistance. Acknowledging that the diminutive Lebanese navy might not be up to the task, LAF Chief Michel Sleiman reportedly piped up to say that the army could secure the coastline and stop all smuggling that way. Murr chuckled at the vision of LAF soldiers stationed up and down Lebanon's beaches. At that point, Murr says he asked Sleiman to keep quiet and to go wait in the vestibule outside the Cabinet chamber.

¶4. (S/NF) Finally Siniora, who had conferred with Berri before the meeting, suggested the Amal ministers should coordinate with their boss. Health Minister Mohammad Khalifeh stepped out of the room to call Berri. Coming back in, presumably much chastened, Khalifeh and the other Amal ministers voted in support of the letter. However, Hizballah still did not approve, indicating that there is a break in the official Shi'a ranks for the first time since the conflict started. The Ambassador asked Murr if he thought the whole break had been orchestrated as a kind of theatre. Noting Khalifeh's phone call to Berri and chastened looks, Murr said that he did not believe so.

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WAYS TO BUILD CONFIDENCE

¶5. (S/NF) Murr asked about reopening the airport, and the Ambassador suggested establishing a "liaison" office there primarily to support the UNIFIL deployment, but also keeping a close eye on the airport. Murr liked the idea very much and suggested that the UN request this from PM Siniora immediately. Siniora could in turn get Acting Interior Minister Ahmed Fatfat to assign office space and security to UNIFIL at the airport, since the Internal Security Forces (ISF) now head the airport security committee.

¶6. (S/NF) The Ambassador asked about other ways to increase international confidence in GOL measures taken to monitor points of entry. Murr said that the LAF would take UNIFIL commander Alain Pelligrini on a land and air tour of its positions in the Biqa' Valley and along the border with Syria, starting 9/6. He added that the 9/4 LAF-UNIFIL-IDF coordination meeting in UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura had gone extremely well and that he expects the IDF to complete its withdrawal in "10-15 days". Murr agreed with the Ambassador's suggestion that the coordination sessions should continue even after the withdrawal is complete, and suggested using the Lebanese desire to modify the 1949 Armistice Agreement -- agreed to and mentioned in Siniora's "Seven Points" plan -- as a hook for this extension.

¶7. (S/NF) The Ambassador remarked that it would also help if the Israelis could have some assurances of the welfare of the two captured IDF soldiers. Couldn't Hizballah take the ICRC to visit the prisoners or provide information? Murr said that the GOL is not involved in the matter, but that Hizballah is unlikely to take the ICRC to visit the captives since it would provide the Israelis an idea of their location. However, Murr suggested that Hizballah could possibly provide to the UN a video of the prisoners holding up a copy of that day's paper.

BOMB TARGETING ISF COLONEL

¶8. (S/NF) The Ambassador asked about that morning's (9/5) bomb blast near Sidon targeting and injuring Lieutenant Colonel Samir Shehata, deputy chief of the ISF's intelligence bureau. Murr said that the bomb contained 10 kilograms of TNT and that Shehata was presumably targeted because of the active role he has played in the investigation into the Hariri assassination as well as other anti-terrorist efforts.

"From my point of view," assessed Murr, "this attack was a Hizballah decision but was executed by Palestinian terrorists from Ain El-Helwe (a Palestinian refugee camp in Sidon)." Murr said Hizballah has a black list of perceived anti-Hizballah figures -- Murr mentioned his name, Saad Hariri, Shehata, and Fuad Siniora as being among the targets. Shehata had apparently been receiving threatening phone calls leading up to the attack.

¶9. (S/NF) As he has done before (reftel), Murr advised the Ambassador not to travel outside of Christian East Beirut, and in particular beyond the areas with a heavy army presence surrounding the Embassy in Awkar and Murr's residence in Rabiye. The Ambassador asked again if Murr has any particular threat information regarding any Embassy personnel. Murr replied that he has nothing, just a bad feeling.

CONFISCATED LAISSEZ-PASSERS FOR HIZBALLAHIS

¶10. (S/NF) Murr said that he had recently discovered that in January 2006 General Sleiman and LAF Intelligence Director George Khoury signed 146 laissez-passers for Hizballah members and their bodyguards to travel armed and unhindered throughout Lebanon. Murr claims they did this without informing him. Murr showed two examples of these permits to the Ambassador (Note. Poloff copied down the two names for possible Visas Viper referral. End Note). Having uncovered this special treatment, Murr has now recalled all of the

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laissez-passers. Hizballah is miffed by Murr's action, and has threatened that he will be held personally responsible for any Hizballah death as a result of their reduced ease of movement.

LAF NEEDS

¶11. (S/NF) Asking again for immediate support for the LAF, Murr noted that the most pressing need is for ammunition. Murr said the army is suffering from a lack of morale due to its unpreparedness, and that several generals have approached him recently with their concerns. In particular, the special forces need to be equipped within two months in order to face down a potential Hizballah-Aounist attempt to foment violence in early November (reftel).

FELTMAN